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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

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THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
22 March 1965

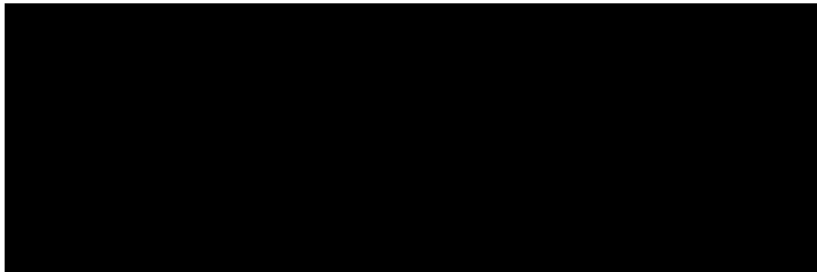
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
22 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

The US Air Strike of 22 March

1. About 20 US aircraft struck the Vinh Son radar site in North Vietnam at about 1600 local Vietnam time (0300 EST) on 22 March. All planes returned safely, except one F-105 which crashed into the sea. The cause of the crash is undetermined. The pilot was recovered safely. Initial pilot reports indicate that the results of the raid were "excellent."

2. Initial field reconnaissance reports indicate that the 21 March South Vietnamese strike against the Vu Con barracks in North Vietnam destroyed five buildings in the target area. The target contained some 64 buildings in all.

Bloc Political Developments

3. The Communist bloc capitals have roundly scored the 21 March South Vietnamese attack, but do not advance any new or different themes in their propaganda treatment of the situation.

4. On the political front, the Chinese Communists have made a new move apparently aimed at bringing pressure against the US to halt its air strikes against North Vietnam and at encouraging French hopes for negotiations on Indochina.

5. The US embassy in Paris has been informed

[REDACTED] that Chou En-lai had a lengthy discussion with French ambassador Paye on 17 March during which the Chinese Premier declared

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that a conference on Vietnam is impossible at this time because of US air strikes against the DRV. He urged that France and the Geneva co-chairmen intercede with the US to halt the attacks. Chou than suggested an "examination" of Prince Sihanouk's plan calling for a new Geneva conference on Cambodia with subsequent talks on Laos and finally on Vietnam.

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despite the "firmness" displayed by Chou the Chinese are afraid of US military power.

Paye evidently believes that US bombing of North Vietnam is having an effect on Communist China and he apparently interprets Chou's remarks as an indication that the strikes may be pushing Peiping toward the conference table.

7.

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8. De Gaulle may believe that Chou's remarks indicate a real possibility that the Chinese are now prepared to soften their position on talks.

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9. Peiping's note to the Cambodian government on 18 March may have been intended to backstop Chou's demarche to the French ambassador. It endorsed the proposal made at the Indochinese People's Conference in Phnom Penh for an international conference to guarantee the neutrality of Cambodia and halt "US aggression" there.

10. The note carefully avoided, however, any suggestion of support for a conference to discuss

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either Laos or Vietnam. It denounced US "military intervention" in these countries and condemned bombing attacks on the DRV, but declared that peace could be achieved in the area only when the "Indo-chinese people" unite to drive out the "American aggressors."

11. Peiping is undoubtedly anxious to halt US air strikes in North Vietnam. The Chinese probably hope to generate international pressure on Washington to this end by implying [REDACTED] that negotiations might be possible if the US ended attacks on the DRV. There is no indication, however, that the Chinese are prepared as yet to pay any substantial price to achieve this goal.

12. Chou En-lai's ambiguous reference to the Cambodian conference plan suggests at most that the Chinese may be angling for a series of protracted discussions which might tie the hands of the US and leave Communist forces in South Vietnam free to continue their campaign against the Saigon government.

13. Chinese discussions [REDACTED] early this month suggested that Peiping was considering an initiative along these lines. During private talks, the Chinese reportedly indicated that Communist China might take part in an international conference if it were convened without preconditions. They noted specifically that Peiping would not insist on prior withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam as the price of such talks, but would be unwilling to condition a conference on cessation of DRV support for the Viet Cong.

Bloc Military Developments

14. No significant military deployments associated with the Vietnam situation have been noted in North Vietnam, Communist China or the Soviet Union during the past twenty-four hours.

15. The Soviet AN-24, which arrived in Hanoi on 21 March, is apparently still there. A Soviet IL-18 which arrived on the same day apparently carried Soviet and East European bloc personnel to attend the Tenth Ministerial Conference of the

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Railway Cooperative Association of the Socialist countries. The arrival of a Chinese Communist IL-14 in North Vietnam on 19 March was probably also related to the conference, since press sources report a Chinese delegation is present.

Viet Cong Military Activity

16. No major Viet Cong actions have been reported today as the Communists continue to emphasize small-scale but widespread guerrilla activity in the countryside.

17. Police investigation of terrorists arrested Saturday for possession of 25 pounds of explosives hidden in their motor scooter has led to the discovery of another 35 pounds of plastic explosives in a house in Saigon. Meanwhile, two grenade incidents were reported in Saigon and Da Nang respectively, but no damage or serious injuries were sustained in either case.

18. Two motorized junks about 25 miles off Binh Dinh Province on 20 March fired on a Vietnamese observer aircraft which had sighted them. Vietnamese fighter aircraft subsequently strafed the junks, disabling one while the other escaped. The disabled junk is being towed to shore. No other details are available at this time.

19. According to unconfirmed press reports, two battalions of South Vietnamese troops were airlifted by 49 helicopters today against a concentration of 1,500 Viet Cong about 10 miles from Da Nang. The area reportedly had previously been softened up by 28 U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft. If confirmed, this action would mark the largest helicopter operation thus far in the South Vietnam Army I Corps.

South Vietnam Political Developments

20. Nothing of significance has been reported in the last 24 hours.

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